

# Child Health Notes

Promoting early identification and partnerships between families, primary health care providers & the community.

Distributed by: Spokane Regional Health District - Children with Special Health Care Needs Program. Contributors: Washington State Department of Health and University of Washington - Center on Human Development and Disability. Electronic versions of Spokane Child Health Notes: [www.srhd.org/health/women-children/childhealthnotes.asp](http://www.srhd.org/health/women-children/childhealthnotes.asp)



## Overweight in Children with Special Needs

We've all heard about the epidemic of "obesity" in children. "Overweight" is defined as a body mass index (BMI) for age greater than 95<sup>th</sup> percentile in children over 2 years of age.

Consequences of being overweight during childhood may include lifelong obesity, early onset of type 2 diabetes, poor self esteem or psychological problems, orthopedic problems from wear and tear on joints, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.

Children with special needs may be more likely to become overweight than other children if their disability causes them to be inactive. It may be difficult for them to move because of poor muscle tone, poor motor coordination or lack of motivation.

Healthy eating and physical activity are the keys to prevention of overweight!

### Internet Resources for Providers:

- ♦ AAP Policy Statement on Prevention of Pediatric Overweight and Obesity, August 2003  
<http://aappolicy.aapublications.org>
- ♦ CDC Growth Charts for calculating BMI [www.cdc.gov/growthcharts](http://www.cdc.gov/growthcharts)

### Nutrition Resources:

This list of nutrition providers is not exhaustive and referrals should be based on the child's needs and the health plan provider network.

- ♦ Holy Family Hospital Outpatient Nutrition Services . . . . . 482-2275
- ♦ Rockwood Clinic Nutrition Services . . . . . 838-2531
- ♦ Sacred Heart Children's Hospital Feeding and Growth Clinic (Multidisciplinary team services for children with special needs, including developmental delays, up to age 10.) . . . . . 474-7185
- ♦ Sacred Heart Medical Center Outpatient Nutrition Services . . . . . 474-3220
- ♦ Spokane Regional Health District Children with Special Health Care Needs Program (Nutrition services for children with special needs birth to age 18 based on the child's needs and available resources.) . . . . . 324-1696
- ♦ WIC (Women, Infant, and Children) for families with children under age 5. Families must meet enrollment criteria and income guidelines. Children with risk factors including accelerated weight gain have access to registered dietitians for individual consultations.
  - ♦ Spokane Regional Health District WIC program (Spokane, Spokane Valley, Deer Park) . . . . . 324-1620
  - ♦ West Central Community Center WIC program (West Central Spokane, Cheney, Fairchild AFB) . . . . 326-9540

# Tips for Parents: promoting healthy eating & physical activity for children with special needs

## Healthy Eating: Practice good eating habits yourself - children learn by imitating YOU!

TRY TO...	AVOID...
Offer 3 nutritious meals and 2 healthy snacks at consistent times each day—children do well with structure/routine. Follow the Food Pyramid guidelines ( <a href="http://www.mypyramid.gov">www.mypyramid.gov</a> ).	Offering food at any time
Offer breakfast everyday—breakfast is especially important for children.	Sending your child to school without breakfast
Offer healthy snacks: fruit, whole grain breads & crackers, cereal; low-fat yogurt/pudding. After age 4: raw carrots, cheese chunks, nuts.	Offering cookies, cake, chips, ice cream, candy, pastries, fried food
Have dessert as part of the meal, but in reasonable portions.	Giving dessert only if a child finishes dinner
Offer age-appropriate portions & allow your child to decide how much to eat of what is served.	Forcing your child to finish
Offer milk, water, 100% juice on occasion (whole milk till age 2, then low-fat or nonfat).	Providing soda pop/soft drinks
Eat together at the table—this helps to separate eating from other activities. Children eat more safely sitting, not walking/lying.	Offering food any place: at the TV or computer, in the car or bedroom
Offer verbal praise or special time with you as a reward. Comfort with attention, listening, hugs, stuffed animals. Find other ways to fill children's time.	Using food as a reward, using food as a comfort, using food as a distraction
Start young! Baby's first meals can be at the family table. Follow your baby's cues so that he learns to eat when hungry, stop when full.	Letting bad habits get set – eating habits are learned early!

## Physical Activity: Be a role model...if you are active, your child will be, too!

TRY TO...
Turn off the TV, turn on the muscles. Limit total screen time (TV, computer, video games) to no more than 2 hours per day.
Make sure your child has the opportunity to move. She doesn't have to become an Olympic athlete - she just needs free time to play and move. Change your child's position every 30-60 minutes if she can't move herself. Avoid restraining your child in seats or adaptive devices for more than 30 minutes at a time.
Take a walk together or go to the park. Play with a ball (roll it, throw it, chase it, kick it). Encourage creative or unstructured play at home. Dance to music! If your child can't stand up, do arm motions to music. Ask your child's teacher or therapist how to adapt an activity or play equipment. See Physical Activity Resources below for community programs and activities.
Ask that your child get physical education (PE) in school. Include physical activity goals in your child's IEP.

### Physical Activity Resources:

- ♦ Spokane County Physical Activity Resource Guide – [www.srhd.org](http://www.srhd.org) (under health- physical activity)
- ♦ Summer Camps and Programs for Children with Special Health Care Needs, Directory for Washington State [www.cshcn.org](http://www.cshcn.org) (under resources) or call toll free – 1-866-987-2500, option 4.
- ♦ Spokane Parks Specialized and Adaptive Recreation Services – 625-6245, [www.spokaneparks.org](http://www.spokaneparks.org)
- ♦ Team St. Luke's Adapted and Wheelchair Sports, Teresa Skinner – 999-6466
- ♦ Special Olympics Washington – 1-800-442-2508, [www.sowa.org](http://www.sowa.org)
- ♦ TOP Soccer (for children ages 4-19 years with physical and/ or mental disabilities) – 892-5325
- ♦ Kick N' Fun (martial arts classes for children with special needs) – 228-0606, [www.kicknfun.com](http://www.kicknfun.com)

We're Online!!  
[www.srhd.org](http://www.srhd.org)



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